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Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2018/227 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific.

* E/CN.3/2019/1.



Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical development in Asia and the Pacific

Summary

In 2016, countries across the Asia-Pacific region agreed to make national statistical capacity development a shared vision for all and agreed to act collectively in five action areas to ensure a coordinated approach. In 2018, in support of that shared vision and such collective action, countries across the region adopted a declaration reflecting their respective commitments to support national statistical systems through political, institutional and financial means.

The present report provides an overview of national, regional and global issues shaping national statistical capacity development in Asia and the Pacific, in particular in the light of the fact that 2020, the target year for 21 of the 169 global targets adopted under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is fast approaching. In the report, ESCAP summarizes the prevailing challenges faced by countries in the Asia-Pacific region with respect to strengthening national statistical systems and supporting national, regional and global agendas and highlights five action areas addressing those challenges: engaging users and investing in statistics; ensuring the quality of and thereby building trust in statistics; using integrated statistics for comprehensive analysis; modernizing statistical business processes; and developing the requisite skill sets.

In the report, ESCAP addresses skills development through training partnerships, joint advocacy efforts for strengthened statistical systems, public-private partnerships and innovation, among other means. It also describes regional coordination mechanisms that are being leveraged for coordinated national statistical capacity development efforts.

The report concludes with recommendations for scaling up international commitment, support and coordination for statistical development in Asia and the Pacific in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

I. Introduction

1. The previous report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on regional statistical development in Asia and the Pacific (E/CN.3/2014/15), issued on 18 December 2013, was submitted to the Statistical Commission for consideration at its forty-fifth session held in March 2014. The report provided an overview of challenges facing countries in the region with regard to the development agenda beyond 2015. In its report, ESCAP posited that, in order to meet compounding demands placed on national statistical systems, statistics needed to be positioned as a development objective in their own right and should be included as a goal in the post-2015 development agenda.

2. The deliberations of the Statistical Commission led to revived attention from countries across the region on the importance of strengthening national statistical systems as an integral part of national development. In line with the reflections in the previous report by ESCAP and the subsequent deliberations of the Statistical Commission, in 2016, the Asia-Pacific statistical community adopted a collective vision and framework for action to advance official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see E/ESCAP/CST(5)/1/Rev.1). That commitment was strengthened in 2018 by the adoption of the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind (ESCAP/CST/2018/7) during a high-level segment attended by policymakers of the sixth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics. The Declaration is available in four languages on the website of the Statistical Commission, as a background document.

3. The Asia-Pacific region is home to 58 ESCAP members and associate members,¹ from Turkey in the west to the Pacific islands in the east, the Russian Federation in the North and New Zealand in the South. The region is also home to 6 of the 10 largest countries by population size, and 3 of the 10 smallest. Chief Statisticians oversee centralized and decentralized statistical systems, statistical systems with and without statistical laws, with staff sizes as small as 3 and as large as 14,000.²

4. As of 2018, national statistical systems in the Asia-Pacific region have contributed 24 voluntary national reviews to the high-level political forum on sustainable development as part of their countries' efforts towards implementing the 2030 Agenda. Three national statistical systems are poised to contribute to their countries' second voluntary national review in 2019, often using data sources that have a ten-year periodicity, such as population and housing censuses, thereby bringing new challenges relating to the monitoring of progress, owing to the unavailability of more current data.

5. The present report covers statistical development activities being undertaken in Asia and the Pacific in support of strengthened national statistical systems. In line with the collective vision and framework for action, the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific (E/ESCAP/73/31, annex II) and the 2030 Agenda itself. The report outlines challenges facing statistical systems in Asia and the Pacific and some key initiatives taken to assist in strengthening them.

6. Countries have agreed on a number of global and regional targets to be attained by 2020, such as improved capacity of national statistical systems to produce and disseminate basic economic statistics, in line with international standards (Regional

¹ The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has 51 member States and 9 associate members. Four member States are not located in the Asia-Pacific region.

² Staff sizes are derived from the findings of a 2013 capacity screening exercise conducted to measure the status of economic statistics in the Asia-Pacific region.

Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific), a midpoint review of the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015–2024 (Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific) and a total of 21 Sustainable Development Goal targets.³ With 2020 fast approaching, countries need to accelerate collective efforts and leverage national, regional and global efforts. The report therefore addresses the prevailing challenges in ensuring coordination at national and all levels.

7. In concluding, ESCAP proposes actions to be taken by the Statistical Communities in order to scale up international commitment and support for statistical development in Asia and the Pacific. Notably, globally, in the context of the 2030 Agenda, and regionally, in the context of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific.

II. National, regional and global agendas

National agendas

8. In October 2018, members of the statistical community of Asia and the Pacific were joined by higher-level policymakers at the sixth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics and adopted the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, in which member States and associate members:

- (a) Committed to integrating statistics development with national development policies and plans;
- (b) Committed to strengthening and developing, where appropriate, a national monitoring framework and to integrating the framework into planning and budgeting processes;
- (c) Committed to establishing a high-level advisory body, where appropriate, to support the national statistical system;
- (d) Committed to specifying the roles and responsibilities of the national statistical system;
- (e) Resolved to empower heads of national statistical offices to assume the lead role in developing and coordinating their respective integrated national statistical systems;
- (f) Endeavoured to strengthen necessary legislative provisions and institutional mechanisms;
- (g) Resolved to improve communication with regard to statistics and to strengthen statistical literacy and culture;
- (h) Committed to advocating the expanded use of official statistics for evidence-based policymaking and transparent governance;
- (i) Committed to revisiting national policies and strategies, as appropriate.

9. In the Declaration, member States and associate members recognized that, in the Asia-Pacific region, a large number of national statistical systems continued to struggle to produce and disseminate basic ranges of economic, environmental and social statistics. That fact was underscored by the ESCAP Statistics Division in the

³ Of 169 global targets, 59 have a global target year of 2030, 21 are targeted for 2020, 3 have different target years (2017 and 2025), and the remaining 86 have no set deadline for achievement.

Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2017,⁴ in which it reported that regionally consistent indicators were only available for 25 per cent of the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

10. The Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) reports on the status of national strategies for the development of statistics in countries across the world. PARIS21 categorizes such strategies by dividing them into two main groups: one for existing strategies and the other for future strategies. In general, countries in the region have such national strategies in place, albeit at various stages of implementation. Of the 37 ESCAP member States included in the 2017 PARIS21 report,⁵ 41 per cent have a national strategy in the implementation phase, 14 per cent have a national strategy that is completed but still awaiting adoption, 22 per cent have an expired national strategy and 24 per cent have no national strategy for the development of statistics. Of the nine ESCAP member States with no national strategy, 44 per cent have no plans to design one.

11. In terms of open data, the Asia-Pacific region is more or less on par with the global average for coverage and openness, according to the 2017 Open Data Inventory.⁶ Nevertheless, there is a wide dispersion among the coverage and openness scores of the 45 member States and associate members⁷ for which data were available and, for some, the status of coverage and openness of official statistics lags considerably behind regional and global averages. The global and regional averages for coverage of 36.4 and 36.9, respectively, while the minimum country-level value stands at 11.5 and the maximum is 60 (figure I). The global and regional openness scores are 45.9 and 45.2, respectively, but the dispersion is wider, with the minimum country-level value standing at 17.5 and the maximum at 87.5 (figure II).

⁴ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.II.F.12.

⁵ Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century, "National strategies for the development of statistics: progress report 2017", February 2017.

⁶ Coverage scores are based on the availability of key indicators and of appropriate disaggregation over time and for geographic subdivisions. Openness scores are based on whether data can be downloaded in machine-readable and non-proprietary formats; whether they are accompanied by metadata; whether download options exist, such as bulk download, user-selection or application programming interfaces; and whether the data have an open term of use.

⁷ Data were not available for the following 13 member States and associate members: American Samoa, Brunei Darussalam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Cook Islands, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, French Polynesia, Guam, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Palau, Tonga and Tuvalu.

Figure I

Status of Open Data Inventory coverage score for 45 countries in the Asia-Pacific region as compared with the regional average

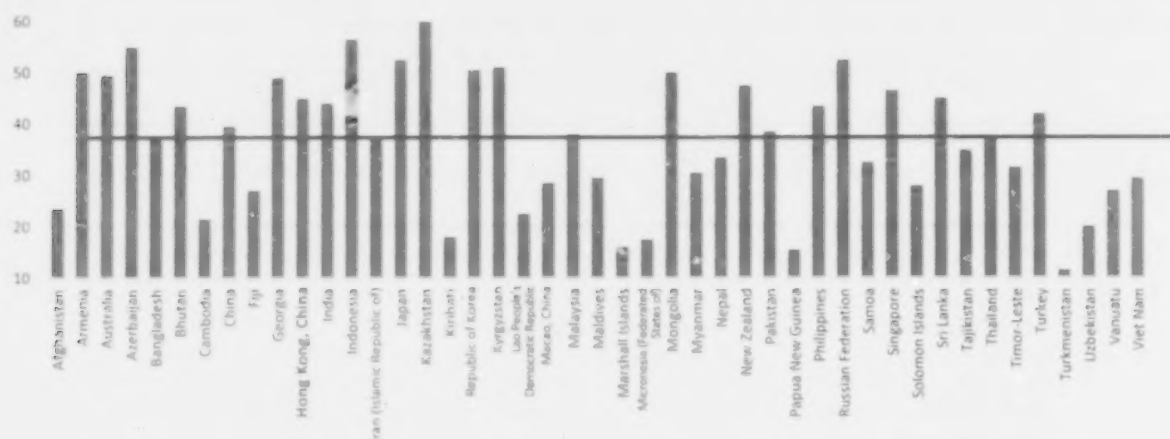
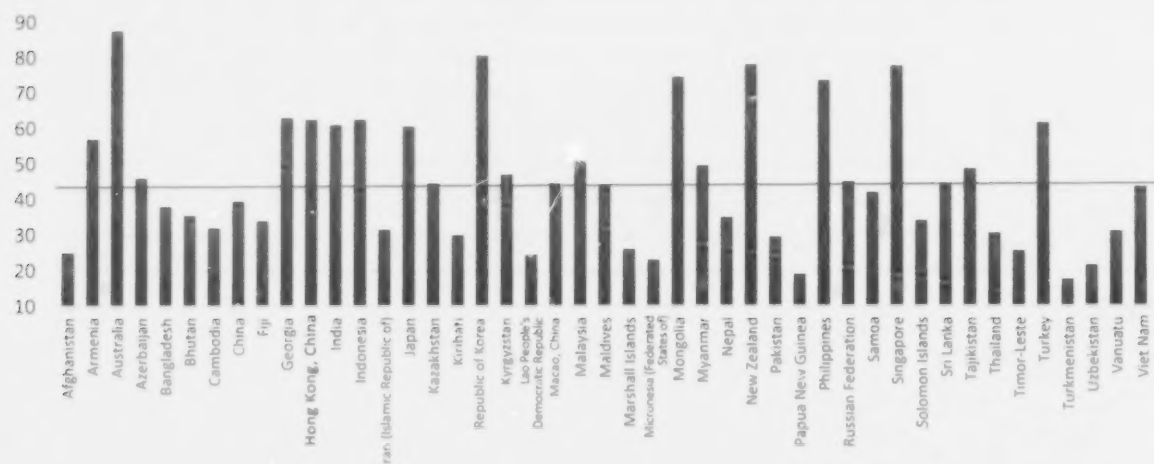


Figure II

Status of Open Data Inventory openness score for 45 countries in the Asia-Pacific region as compared with the regional average



12. In 2017, a screening exercise was conducted as part of the ESCAP Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific to assess the status of the production and dissemination of economic statistics in the region. In all, 50 countries participated in the screening exercise. Respondents answered questions on statistical infrastructure and on institutional aspects of their national statistical systems such as statistical law, standards and classifications,

organizational structure, quality assurance, statistical registers, censuses and surveys, human resources and statistical training.⁸

13. All but one of the 50 respondents reported having a statistical act in place in 2017. All 49 statistical acts include provisions on the protection of confidentiality of respondents' information, while 47 include provisions on transparency and 46 have provisions to protect the professional independence of official statistics agencies. Of the 49 statistical acts, 36 were reported to include provisions allowing agencies in the national statistical system to acquire administrative data for statistical purposes. Twenty-five respondents indicated that their country's Government planned to change the statistical act. The most common reason cited for the intended change was that the current statistical act did not provide sufficient access to administrative data (see ESCAP/CST/2018/INF/4).

Regional agenda

14. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region have developed and agreed to a regional road map to facilitate cooperation at the regional level for implementing the 2030 Agenda, supported by the ESCAP secretariat and other United Nations entities. The road map was agreed during the fourth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, held in 2017, and subsequently endorsed by ESCAP in its resolution 73/9.

15. In the road map, ESCAP members identify priority areas of regional cooperation for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Those priority areas underline the major challenges still faced in the Asia-Pacific region, including leaving no one behind; disaster risk reduction and resilience; climate change; the management of natural resources; connectivity; and energy. Priority areas for cooperation under means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda are also identified in the road map and include data and statistics, technology, finance, policy coherence and partnerships.

16. With regard to data and statistics, according to the roadmap, it will be impossible to review progress on Sustainable Development Goal implementation and, consequently, improve performance without credible figures and indicators. And since 88 of the 232 global Sustainable Development Goal indicators lacked methodological guidelines or standards at the time the road map was endorsed in May 2017, the road map contains a call for urgent action to strengthen the statistical capacities of member States.

17. The road map outlines the following five opportunities for regional cooperation:

(a) Promote the need for national statistical systems to be responsive to the requirements of users arising from the 2030 Agenda, and the need to encourage investments in national statistical systems that are adequate to meet statistical requirements and to support implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as appropriate;

(b) Formulate and implement continuous, comprehensive and system-wide strategies for the development of statistics, including statistics for the 2030 Agenda;

(c) Provide and promote capacity-building support to national statistical systems to increase the availability of high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated data, including through the development of integrated measurement frameworks for Sustainable Development Goal statistics that integrate data from

⁸ ESCAP, Statistics Division, "Report on the capacity screening of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific 2017", October 2018. Available at http://communities.unescap.org/system/files/capacity_screening_2017_-_final_rev.pdf.

multiple sources, including big data, in a coherent and consistent manner to support the comprehensive analysis of sustainable development issues;

(d) Organize national statistical system business processes and modernize tools for strengthened quality, efficiency and effectiveness of statistical information management and exchange;

(e) Build the skills of the staff and management of national statistical systems, including of relevant data producers, to enhance the human resources capacity for generating the statistical products and services required for the monitoring of national development plans and the 2030 Agenda.

18. The road map builds on the collective vision and framework for action adopted in 2016 by the ESCAP Committee of Statistics and endorsed by ESCAP in 2017. In the collective vision and framework for action, the Asia-Pacific statistical community recognizes the need to transform its understanding of the core business of official statistics from the production of time series and tables to the provision of statistical products and services more directly tailored to the needs of users.

19. In the collective vision, the Asia-Pacific statistical community communicates its shared ambition leading up to the year 2030. The framework for action translates that vision into collective action in priority areas that include advocacy, investment, user engagement and the enabling of the production and use of integrated statistics through methodological work, the modernization of business processes and the strengthening of skills.

20. In its collective vision, the Asia-Pacific statistical community, consisting of the leaders of national statistical systems and development partners active in the region, shared its vision that, by 2030, national statistical systems would be enabled and empowered to lead the development of and deliver innovative, trusted and timely products and services for the urgent and evolving statistical requirements of the 2030 Agenda. The community also stated that a transformed national statistical system was one in which:

(a) The skills base of staff in statistical institutions transcend traditional disciplines;

(b) Statistical organizations, through modernized statistical business processes, were purveyors of information in the era of big data;

(c) Legal and institutional structures firmly supported the application of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics⁹ in guiding statistical management and development in a changing environment of increased demands, new data sources and complex uses of statistics;

(d) Relationships with users of statistical products and services were recast with the clients as their focus.

21. In the framework for action, the statistical community agreed to focus its collaborative efforts on the following action areas:

(a) Action area A: engaging users and investing in statistics

(b) Action area B: ensuring the quality of and building trust in statistics

(c) Action area C: using integrated statistics for comprehensive analysis

⁹ The Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics were adopted by the Economic and Social Council through its resolution 2013/21 and subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly through its resolution 68/261.

- (d) Action area D: modernizing statistical business processes
- (e) Action area E: developing the requisite skill sets

Global agenda

22. In the 2030 Agenda, States Members of the United Nations committed to engaging in the systematic follow-up and review of its implementation between 2015 and 2030. Developing countries, in particular African countries, least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, would be supported in strengthening the capacity of their national statistical offices and data systems to ensure access to high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data. Transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public-private cooperation would be promoted in order to exploit the contribution to be made by a wide range of data, including earth observation and geospatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress.¹⁰

23. The ESCAP regional road map and the collective vision and framework for action directly support strengthening the capacity of national statistical offices and data systems to ensure access to high-quality, timely and reliable data, disaggregated by relevant characteristics.

24. However, more can be done to promote the transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public-private cooperation in order to exploit the contribution of a wide range of data, including earth observation and geospatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress. Plans for achieving that objective are discussed in section III below.

25. The objective of reducing the risk of impact caused by disasters features prominently in the 2030 Agenda, and relevant targets and indicators are included in Goals 1, to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, 11, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and 13, to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Global indicators relating to disaster risk reduction are fully aligned with the agreed indicators for monitoring the targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, adopted in 2015.

26. Current United Nations reforms are repositioning the United Nations development system to meet the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see General Assembly resolution 72/279).

27. Support for the development of data and statistics for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda is emerging as a key priority in many countries. The field has been identified as a development priority in country-specific United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks.

28. ESCAP is responding by aligning its country-level activities to meet that need, including by providing direct support to national statistical offices, as well as support to and through United Nations resident coordinators and country teams. To that end, a position of regional adviser for official statistics for the 2030 Agenda has been created to be a focal point for single-country data and statistics support.

¹⁰ General Assembly resolution 70/1, paras. 72 and 76.

III. Looking ahead, 2019–2024

Action area A: engaging users and investing in statistics

29. Outreach, user engagement and investing in statistics are critical to strengthening national statistical systems.

30. Following the successful trial of the Every Policy Is Connected (EPIC) tool in the Philippines and in Samoa, the ESCAP Committee on Statistics has endorsed it as a generic tool to enhance user-producer engagement in order to establish effective demand for data at the national level in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Future plans are to invest in streamlining the tool with an app and to continue to apply it in other areas, not just social policies and gender policies. Geospatial policies are one possible area for consideration. All members of the Statistical Commission are invited to explore the use of the tool for engaging users and investing in statistics.

31. Disaster-related statistics is one area in particular where ESCAP is pioneering and actively contributing to global statistical standards. The Disaster-related Statistics Framework for Asia and the Pacific was designed collaboratively by statistics users and producers, making it an example for the implementation of the principle of user engagement outlined in the collective vision and framework for action. The Framework includes detailed descriptions of the uses of the standard products of statistical offices, such as censuses and surveys, for the development of evidence-based disaster risk reduction policies.

32. Acknowledging the contribution of ESCAP to the development of recommendations and guidance on disaster-related statistics, the Statistical Commission, at its forty-ninth session, decided to step up global efforts in that regard by building on existing work by ESCAP and others. ESCAP is currently working with the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction to bring the Disaster-related Statistics Framework for Asia and the Pacific to the global level at the fifty-first session of the Statistical Commission. Their progress is outlined in the following reports: ESCAP/74/24 and E/CN.3/2019/16.

33. In 2020, ESCAP will host a ministerial conference to mark the midterm review of the aim to “get everyone in the picture” as part of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade, 2015–2024. Noting that civil registration systems are, could be and should be the source of some 67 global Sustainable Development Goal indicators,¹¹ ESCAP is exploring advocacy efforts to bring greater attention to the importance of well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics systems. The 2019 high-level political forum and the 2019 World Economic Forum are two events that ESCAP and its partners are discussing.

34. In terms of investing in statistics, several statistical development activities are underway or planned in Asia and the Pacific. ESCAP has worked with member States to pilot the use of geospatial data, integrated with official statistics, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.¹² That work was presented in 2018 at the Conference of the International Association for Official Statistics on Better Statistics for Better Lives, jointly organized with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and received positive feedback and considerable interest. ESCAP is also directly supporting several national statistics offices in their trials on the use of mobile

¹¹ See Samuel Mills and others, *Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) for Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*, paper prepared for the World Bank eLearning course on civil registration and vital statistics systems, May 2017.

¹² See ESCAP, Statistics Division, “Report on the capacity screening of economic statistics in Asia and the Pacific 2017”.

phone data for official statistics. ESCAP has undertaken research on integrating household survey and census data to support poverty measurement and jointly hosted a regional workshop on the use of earth observations for official statistics with the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

35. Nevertheless, member States are looking for more. National statistical offices would like, or are being asked by their Ministers, to exploit a range of data, including administrative, scanner, mobile phone and geospatial data. Several Asian countries are members of the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, which provides welcome leadership in that field, and ESCAP is actively promoting the activities of the Global Working Group to the wider statistical community in Asia and the Pacific. As a member of the Group, ESCAP wove the use of a wide range of data sources into each of its four contributions to the United Nations World Data Forum, held in 2018. ESCAP is also jointly organizing a side event with the Statistics Division, to be held in Malaysia in 2019, on the margins of the sixty-second International Statistical Institute World Statistics Congress, in order to share knowledge and build skills across Asia and the Pacific in the use of big data sources for official statistics. A special topic session has also been organized for the Congress in 2019. In 2019, at the Asia Pacific Economic Statistics Week, an annual forum to produce and share practical research on improving economic statistics, emphasis will be placed on papers that demonstrate the use of alternative data sources for official statistics.

36. Public-private partnerships are also needed. In that regard, the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) official statistics modernization programme providing grants for the 2020 round of population censuses, has been promoted by ESCAP to its member States and associate members. ESCAP also welcomes the support provided by the Research Institute for the geospatial and statistical work done on oceans, as well as its federated system of data hubs for the Sustainable Development Goals. ESCAP will also be promoting and seeking partnerships, for example through twinning arrangements and South-South cooperation, to support the Asia-Pacific statistical community in exploiting the use of a range of data for official statistics.

37. As a regional commission, ESCAP showcases regional progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda. In 2017, only 25 per cent of the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators could be reported on at the regional level, leaving a long way to go to address gaps in official statistics for the measurement and full understanding of progress made towards 2030 Agenda implementation. Using a greater range of data sources for the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators is one means to achieve that objective. Using a wider range of statistics, in addition to those traditionally considered for official statistics, is another option.

38. As presented in the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2017*, ESCAP tested the use of six proxy indicators from official statistical sources where official global Sustainable Development Goal indicators are still under development. In the 2018 report, ESCAP will present an analysis of situations in which a wider range of data sources could be used for Sustainable Development Goal reporting purposes.

39. Countries and development partners in Asia and the Pacific are also seeking advice and assistance with regard to a significant user engagement challenge: reporting on and communicating progress made in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

40. The United Nations issues many types of reports and communicates progress in a number of ways, including globally, sectorally and regionally. For instance, in *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018*,¹³ a descriptive statistical analysis of

¹³ United Nations publications, Sales No. E.18.1.6.

selected global indicators is presented for each of the 17 Goals. In the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2017*, the ESCAP Statistics Division presents an analysis of progress made towards the regional achievement of the Goals and targets, based mainly on the global indicators, as well as on a small number of proxy indicators from official data sources where insufficient data were available for a given Goal.

41. Other reports include the report by Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network on the Sustainable Development Goals index and dashboards,¹⁴ in which a ranking of country-level achievement of the 2030 Agenda is presented using a combination of the global indicators and indicators and statistics from both official and non-official data sources.

42. While those reports address the various needs of decision makers, they pose challenges to the country-led nature of the 2030 Agenda and to the production of coherent progress narratives. To that end, ESCAP is working with countries to build their reporting and communication skills. ESCAP is also providing tools and progress measurement methods to enhance follow-up and review capacities at the country and regional levels for Sustainable Development Goal targets and indicators. In addition, in March 2019, ESCAP will be releasing a regional gateway to the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators and a tool for countries to self-assess their progress against Goal targets.

43. ESCAP is also working within the United Nations system, including with the regional United Nations sustainable development group for Asia and the Pacific, to present tools and methodologies to United Nations country teams. ESCAP takes an active role in discussions with country teams on the different types of reporting that exist, the advantages and disadvantages of each and the issues that can arise therefrom. Discussion topics may include country rankings, the use of non-official data sources and divergence from the global Sustainable Development Goal indicator framework.

44. ESCAP is partnering with the Bureau of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics to discuss reporting and communication for the 2030 Agenda. It invites the Commission to discuss navigating the various reporting and communication challenges given that coherence is a global, regional and national issue.

45. The ESCAP Committee on Statistics and ESCAP itself are key intergovernmental forums for engaging with users and investing in statistics. In adopting the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, ESCAP agreed:

(a) To support member States in their efforts to implement the collective vision and framework for action in an integrated manner and in the light of the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific;

(b) To continue its engagement with development partners and other relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure the ongoing, coordinated and effective implementation of the Declaration and the collective vision and framework for action;

(c) To prepare an overview of progress in implementing the Declaration, every two years, for review by the Committee on Statistics;

¹⁴ Jeffrey Sachs and others, *SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2018: Global Responsibilities – Implementing the Goals* (Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network, New York, 2018)

(d) To submit the outcome of the high-level segment of the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics, including the Declaration, to ESCAP at its seventy-fifth session, to be held in 2019;

(e) To organize a midpoint conference in 2024, as appropriate, to gauge the extent of success and to reflect on its commitment.

Action area B: ensuring the quality of and building trust in statistics

46. Since 2012, ESCAP has been involved in the discussion among global experts regarding the development and implementation of, and capacity-building for, a generic national quality assurance framework. Currently, ESCAP is actively engaged in the expert discussions on updating the generic framework and on developing a United Nations manual for its implementation (see E/CN.3/2019/6).

47. Trust in official statistics is fundamental to our business. A special session held in 2018, in conjunction with the Conference of the International Association for Official Statistics, brought together members of the official statistical community to discuss the importance of ensuring the quality of and building trust in statistics as a foundation of demand for statistics. The Asia-Pacific region is no exception to that value and therefore continues to pursue efforts to build trust in national statistical systems and official statistics.

48. ESCAP will be working with the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on a new thematic seminar series of regional conferences on managing statistical offices in times of change. The conferences will bring together chief statisticians from across the region to share their experiences and knowledge so as to prepare for the ever-growing needs of national statistical systems.

49. The field of civil registration and vital statistics is a particular area where building trust is needed. Many vital statistics in the Asia-Pacific region continue to be sourced from surveys. ESCAP will continue to advocate the production of vital statistics using data from civil registration systems, including with global partners.

50. Developments in the area of legal identity systems have the potential to affect trust in civil registration and vital statistic systems. ESCAP is keeping a watchful eye on developments with regard to legal identity systems, as well as on the ongoing progress being made across Africa and other regions, and is reinforcing the importance of trusted and well-functioning civil registration systems for official statistics.

Action area C: using integrated statistics for comprehensive analysis

51. The ocean is vital to the global climate and economy, but it is being degraded by overfishing, pollution and climate change. Policies affecting the ocean are as fragmented as the existing data on the subject. Unified ocean governance needs unified ocean accounts. ESCAP is pioneering a partnership-building initiative for the development of ocean accounts based on the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA). ESCAP is leveraging its convening role to build partnerships in order to enhance awareness and understanding of ocean-related issues and to accelerate action for a healthy ocean. At its forty-ninth session, the Statistical Commission accepted the offer made by ESCAP and the United Nations Environment Programme to lead the development of statistical guidance on ocean accounts as part of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting revision process (see E/CN.3/2019/15).

52. ESCAP is currently strengthening its activities in support of data integration. Specifically, it is expanding its activities with member States to build their capacity to integrate traditional data sources, such as survey, census and administrative data, with each other and with a wider range of data, such as scanner, geospatial and mobile phone data, for official statistics.

53. ESCAP welcomes the support of development partnerships in those areas, in particular the support provided by partners of national statistical offices in twinning with countries in the region to build knowledge, skills and capabilities.

Action area D: modernizing statistical business processes

54. As highlighted in the collective vision and framework for action, ESCAP has prioritized the modernization of statistical systems. ESCAP support in that regard is focused on three areas: strengthening business registers; increasing the quality and coverage of civil registration systems; and improving the technical capacity of countries to exchange data and metadata. To that end, ESCAP collaborated with the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to host a regional Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) workshop in December 2018.

55. ESCAP has initiated efforts to support countries in modernizing their statistical business processes. In 2018, ESCAP helped a member State to participate in a workshop for trainers to learn about SDMX and subsequently transfer that knowledge to other colleagues in the national statistical system. Experts from national statistical offices, central banks, international agencies and the private sector collaborated to identify and resolve issues and work towards the development of a standard. Work on modernizing statistical business processes in the region is expected to accelerate as a result of such knowledge-sharing and collaboration among the various stakeholders.

56. ESCAP will also be increasing its overall focus on modernizing statistical business. In particular, as noted earlier, several statistical development activities are underway or planned in Asia and the Pacific to promote the transparent and accountable scaling-up of appropriate public-private cooperation in order to exploit the contribution of a wide range of data to the 2030 Agenda, including earth observation and geospatial information, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress. If successful, ESCAP expects to see a wider range of data used for official statistics in country-led voluntary national reviews and in future editions of the *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report*. Its member States and associate members are keen, and the continued support of global partners, in particular the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, is greatly appreciated. Twinning and South-South cooperation would also be very welcome.

Action area E: developing the requisite skill sets

57. The Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), a regional institution of ESCAP, is mandated to strengthen, through the provision of practical training to official statisticians, the capability of developing members and associate members, as well as of economies in transition in the region, to collect, analyse and disseminate statistics and to produce timely and high-quality statistics that can be utilized for economic and social development planning. It is also mandated to assist those developing members and associate members and economies in transition in

establishing or strengthening their statistical training capability and other related activities.¹⁵

58. Since the Institute was established in 1970, ESCAP member States have relied on it to be effective, efficient and dynamic in providing, leading and coordinating statistical training in the region. At its seventy-fourth session in May 2018, ESCAP expressed appreciation for the work of the Institute, including the statistical training it had provided in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. ESCAP suggested further strengthening the Institute's stream of work, including through additional e-learning courses on indicators for measuring the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and training on disaster- and climate change-related statistics and on the application and use of geographic information systems and big data to produce official statistics (ESCAP/74/44, para. 132).

59. The Institute's training programmes are aligned with the collective vision and framework for action and the regional road map.

60. Through the Institute and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ESCAP is working to strengthen the network of training institutes in Asia and the Pacific. In that regard, the Institute and the Division are collaborating with the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (Rosstat) and the Higher School of Economics at the National Research University in Moscow on the development and delivery of face-to-face and distance training programmes in the Russian language, to meet the needs of Central Asian countries. In collaboration with the Pacific subregional office of ESCAP, the Institute and the Division are also developing a programme with the University of the South Pacific, with three potential areas of focus: official statistics, environmental statistics and the Sustainable Development Goal indicators for countries in the Pacific region.

IV. Collaboration and coordination

61. One of the key principles of the collective vision and framework for action is to realign and sharpen the focus of existing collaborative initiatives towards accelerating progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Using that principle as a guiding rule, ESCAP also continues to be guided by several regional capacity development initiatives overseen by member States and international organizations. These organizations include the Steering Group for the Regional Programme for the Improvement of Economic Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Regional Steering Group on Population and Social Statistics, the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific, the Expert Group on Disaster-related Statistics in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Steering Committee for Asia and the Pacific for the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics.

62. Virtual communities of practice will be established, following the identification of regional mechanisms on integrated statistics and innovation as a priority by the Asia-Pacific statistical community at the sixth session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics.

63. In 2013, the Bureau of the Committee on Statistics established the Network for the Coordination of Statistical Training in Asia and the Pacific, the membership of which now includes 25 countries and international organizations. Although the Network is facing some challenges in terms of commitment from members and the implementation of targets, ESCAP is working with it to expedite knowledge-sharing

¹⁵ See Council resolution 2005/36, annex, para. 4.

through the sharing of training materials as well as by expanding the scope of training subjects (see ESCAP/CST/2018/4).

64. In addition to working with the steering groups, ESCAP is collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, through the Global Strategy to Improve Agriculture and Rural Statistics, and with the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in a number of thematic areas, such as ocean accounts, disaster-related statistics and big data. The Division is a member of all regional steering groups in the Asia-Pacific region.

65. At the regional level, ESCAP leverages the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism to facilitate a coordinated approach for statistical capacity development among member States, through thematic working groups on statistics, disaster risk reduction, resilience for disaster-related statistics and statistics relating to gender equality and women's empowerment.

66. In order to help improve coordination at the regional level, in adopting the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind, member States and associate members in Asia and the Pacific called upon development partners:

(a) To provide coordinated technical, financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to countries and to ensure that countries have full access to data held by development partners in support of the implementation of the collective vision and framework for action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(b) To consult the national statistical office or national statistical system concerned before conducting any statistical study or survey;

(c) To continue to develop and strengthen international statistical standards and to provide technical support for their implementation.

V. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

67. The Statistical Commission is invited to:

(a) Discuss the global relevance of the Declaration on Navigating Policy with Data to Leave No One Behind issued by the Asia-Pacific statistical community and to consider recommending the Declaration for adoption by the Economic and Social Council as a critical means for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics;

(b) Take note of the progress made by countries in Asia and the Pacific and by development partners to implement the collective vision and framework for action by the Asia-Pacific statistical community for advancing official statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to discuss the approaches outlined therein for advancing the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific, in particular:

(i) Through collaboration to strengthen national statistical systems in order to exploit a range of data sources and methods for official statistics and to address availability challenges with the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators, thereby leapfrogging the era of sample survey reliance, where appropriate (see paragraphs 34–36);

(i') By navigating the challenges relating to Sustainable Development Goal reporting and communication to ensure the production of trusted and coherent progress narratives at the national, regional and global levels (see paragraphs 37–44);

(c) Support the call by member States in Asia and the Pacific for development partners to:

- (i) Provide coordinated technical, financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to countries;
- (ii) Ensure that countries have full access to data held by development partners;
- (iii) Consult the national statistical office or national statistical system concerned before conducting any statistical study or survey;
- (iv) Continue to develop and strengthen international statistical standards and provide technical support for their implementation.

